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Open-Ended Classroom: “Eliduc” by Marie de France and “The Belt” by Dietrich von der Gletze

Albrecht Classen 

Department of German Studies, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721, USA

ABSTRACT

In Education, we often confuse two concepts, knowledge and wisdom. It is easy to convey facts, i.e., knowledge, without achieving much in our students’ minds. They might learn via (rote) memorization but then simply accumulate data and do not transform mentally, that is, they do not fully learn and hence do not grow in intellectual terms. The ultimate goal of good teaching is really the acquisition of wisdom, which emerges only in the course of time when a person becomes empowered to balance all the available facts, or to determine what facts there truly are. In the face of a growing availability of AI, for instance, and similar knowledge-producing and storing internet sources, we suddenly face the ancient question again: what true education and hence learning means. Examining two significant medieval verse narratives, this paper will illustrate the great advantage of open-ended forums (aka flipped classroom) as a future-oriented teaching approach in this field of inquiry (medieval or pre-modern literature). It is more important, as this paper argues, for our new student generation to understand the complexity of a matter and to have the intellectual competence to examine it controversially and discriminatingly than to know the many facts surrounding a text, an image, or an object, which can be easily retrieved through print sources or online. What truly matters is the individual’s ability to join an intellectual discourse and to engage with the complex issues in a deeply critical manner informed by the many perspectives one can possibly pursue.

Keywords: Open-Ended Classroom Discussions; Flipped Classroom; Discussion-Based Learning; Complex Discourse as an Opportunity in the 21st Century; Humanities and AI; Medieval Literature Today; Marie de France; Dietrich von der Gletze

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Albrecht Classen, Department of German Studies, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721, USA, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721, USA;
Email: aclassen@arizona.edu

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1. Introduction

1.1. Why Do We Teach and How Do We Teach, for What Purpose?

The internet is growing constantly and provides ever more concrete and specialist information, which makes it seemingly unnecessary for the younger generation to learn any facts. Google or Wikipedia seem to be so expansive that there is no more any point to study facts, since everything can be checked online, as many people believe. Any decent search engine can now replace most learning operations that used to take hours, days, and weeks, accomplishing and completing them within minutes, if not seconds. However, this impression is highly deceptive because we will always have to rely on the availability of knowledge in a complex fashion in order to comprehend certain phenomena, to make connections with others, and thus to expand from established understanding to new insights. Whether AI will ever be able to substitute the human brain might be questionable, but no one can predict future developments. The critical question to be explored here pertains to the common notion of what learning and knowledge really mean and what we want to achieve with our entire school and university system. This might be like carrying the proverbial coals to Newcastle, but in essence, we really must investigate this point again before we can engage critically with the technological challenges today.

1.2. Facts versus Knowledge/Wisdom

In the sciences, in mathematics, in medicine, and other fields, researchers do not raise, so it seems, commonly questions as to the relevance of hard facts because the comprehension of large-scale phenomena requires the availability of fundamental facts, such as the chemical elements, mathematical formulas, or the functions of body parts. However, recent research in medicine, for instance, has also discovered the enormous impact of soft elements, such as music, literature, the fine arts, and other media as relevant for the healing process (among many recent publications, see, for instance, the contributions to Ionescu and Margaroni^[1]; Sheppard^[2]). This means, as important as medical, biological, and physical data prove to be for the rational comprehension of the object of investigation, there are strong indications that many

non-factual aspects also need to be considered for a full realization of the issues at stake. Ultimately, this would be the marriage of Humanities and the Natural Sciences at least in certain areas.

It continues to be somewhat mysterious what those literary or artistic media contribute to the patient's well-being, but the entire field of Medical Humanities has proven to be impressively effective in bringing about a radical transformation of the healing process in the 21st century^[3,4]. The critical terms used here are 'warm humanities' and 'cold technology.' We need both, but we currently still face a severe imbalance both in practice and theory, especially within the learning environment.

The future of teaching rests in much more independent research learning practices, which can be achieved individually or in the collective^[5]. Similarly, open-ended discussions about problematic issues invite highly productive research investigations, and this by students. If, for instance, issues arise during such discussions, which require further explorations, student groups can be tasked with carrying out that research and reporting their results. This, in turn, will considerably increase students' motivation and interest in the subject matter and lead to considerable professionalization already at the undergraduate level. Interpretive research, experiential learning, enjoyment of study and presentation of research, and enhanced rhetorical skills constitute some of the ideals for innovative teaching strategies^[6]. If students are encouraged to ask their own questions about a subject matter, bring their personal experiences to the table and examine those in light of past and present examples, and thus learn to investigate their own culture and others, we can count on having achieved some of the highest teaching goals. In such a situation, students become empowered to take charge of their own educational process and co-determine the course of the discussion in a class. Ultimate, we can expect that such a learning situation will have a life-long impact and bring about true and deep education in the light of the German term *Bildung*. Acquiring knowledge of long-established facts and concepts certainly proves to be valid and useful in many contexts, but the ultimate goal ought to be the transformation of our students into innovators, creators, social leaders, and reformers. All this has already been discussed for quite some time under the category of the 'flipped classroom'^[7,8], but one of the difficult questions remains as to its implementation

in the examination of medieval and early modern literature.

1.3. Social and Cultural Differences

Students tend to explain many ‘strange’ or inexplicable aspects away by referring to the historical framework, thus refusing to accept the applicability of the central messages contained already in those texts. But universal topics never go away, and viewing human issues through a historical-literary lens proves to be critically important also for us today. Already Aristotle and countless other philosophers, theologians, and writers throughout the Middle Ages and beyond reflected on the ideals of friendship, peace, and happiness as the ethical foundations of the human community. None of their insights have lost in value until today.

Every society needs this jolt of energy coming from the young people so that it can move forward, meet the constantly emerging challenges of technology and the environment, and become proactive in dealing with dangers and challenges. Already Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) had urged us to keep these pedagogical ideals in mind when he differentiated between the “computational mind” and the “philosophical head”^[9,10]. This in turn was actually based on the concept already developed by Friedrich Schiller in his first lecture at the University of Jena in 1789 (for a good and also recent summary and critical commentary, see Alvesson, Einola, and Schaefer^[11]; cf. also Alvesson, Yiannis, and Paulsen^[12], who had contrasted the “Brotgelehrte” (a student thinking only of gaining sufficient knowledge to take on a job earning a good income to pay for his food [bread]) with the “philosophische Kopf,” i.e., a person who would strive for a comprehensive education and gain the ability to understand the foundations of this world in its complexities^[13].

2. Two Practical Examples of the Effective Use of the Flipped Classroom

2.1. Marie de France

To illustrate how the open-ended exploration of literary texts can work to establish a flipped classroom, this paper draws on numerous experiences with medieval verse narratives that have regularly provoked many reactions and motivated students to enter into debates with each other. Those

debates forced them to listen to each other, to weigh and balance the various opinions, and thus to establish a higher-level scholarly environment with them all personally involved. This paper does not work with statistical data, which would be hard to come by anyway. Instead, the purpose is to illustrate through two concrete examples in medieval French and German literature how the larger goal of this approach can effectively be achieved. To lay the foundation for the pedagogical reflections, it is necessary first to illustrate the potency and meaningfulness of the two literary examples for students of different ages, backgrounds, and cultures.

One of the most charming and delightful medieval poets was Marie de France (fl. ca. 1170–ca. 1200), who left us important verse narratives about love, marriage, friendship, and happiness (*lais*), didactic and moralizing fables (*fabes*), and a hagiographical text (if not two). In the *lais*, the focus constantly rests on questions pertaining to people’s erotic desires and problems in unhappy marriage, and hence on ways to extricate the protagonist from his or her sorrowful stage in life. The poet regularly raises critical issues concerning people’s behavior, power struggles, vices, and virtues (for a solid edition and translation, see Waters^[14]; for a comprehensive discussion, see Kinoshita and McCracken^[15]). Numerous times, young women are unhappily married to old, jealous, and greedy, if not impotent husbands, but there are also evil wives, traitors, and distrustful individuals.

The most important *lai*, which has triggered countless discussions, concerns the life of the male protagonist, Eliduc. Whereas in other *lais* we can fairly easily identify the admirable or the contemptible individual, in *Eliduc*, we face a severe problem, and it is here where the open-ended discussion emerges as the most productive medium for learning because the conclusion of the story makes it very difficult for any reader or listener to reach firm and straightforward conclusions.

The relationship between Eliduc and his wife Guidelüec seems to be predicated in some ways on the model provided by the two famous twelfth-century lovers and then marriage partners, Abelard and Heloise (Classen^[16]; cf. also Vishnuvajjala^[17]), who, late in life, lived apart from each other in monastic communities and communicated via letters. However, Marie complicates the matter considerably because Eliduc falls in love with a young princess, Guiliadun, and elopes with her while he is still married back

home. Thus, a third person enters into this narrative account who has a strong title on the male protagonist who does not seem to know how to handle his emotional situation, truly an aporia and a deep challenge of his masculinity, and so he ultimately depends on his wife to solve the case for him.

As is often the case in Marie's *lais*, "Eliduc" contains strong political criticism because slanderers have made it impossible for the protagonist to stay at the king's court. In fact, he is exiled and goes to England, where he rescues a king from his opponents and achieves a great military triumph. The king's daughter Guilliadun falls in love with him and actively woos him, and he responds in kind, entirely disregarding his marital status. Then he has to return home because his own king suddenly faces a major military threat himself, which he cannot handle without Eliduc's help, which also indicates how wrong the king had been in the first place. The latter handles this challenge, as he always does, to everyone's full satisfaction, and then he returns to England, eloping with the princess. However, while the ship crosses the Channel, they run into a major storm and are afraid of suffering shipwreck. In his fright, one of the sailors shouts out that this would be God's punishment for Eliduc's actions, bringing a second wife home with him, although he is already married. The poor princess is deeply shocked by this news and falls into a coma. Eliduc, enormously infuriated, kills the sailor with an oar and pushes the body into the water.

Deeply distraught about the presumed death of his beloved, he takes over the steering of the ship and guides it safely to the harbor. Then he carries her corpse to a hermitage, which is abandoned by then because the hermit has passed away. He places his beloved on the altar in the chapel and begins a ritual of praying on her behalf, but nothing happens—Guilliadun does not wake up and yet does not die either, so her body, despite some paleness, remains as fresh as ever. Possibly, Marie had the model of a saint's body in mind which does not rot and remains a mystery for the faithful (Schmitz-Esser^[18], ch. 3, 177–314). His wife, suspicious of Eliduc's behavior, or rather deeply troubled because she cares about him, soon learns the truth, and while observing the young princess and admiring her almost divine beauty while resting seemingly dead on the altar, a weasel comes running out from underneath, which a servant kills with his staff. Soon, a second animal appears, which woefully realizes its companion's death, and runs for a magical petal with

which it can revive it miraculously.

We need to follow the plot in greater detail here to understand the philosophical, ethical, and moral implications as they pertain also to us today in a true educational context, creating the background of or foundation for intensive student engagement. As a reminder, here I want to demonstrate how open-ended narratives also from the high Middle Ages can perfectly serve to create a flipped classroom, maybe particularly because the medieval context establishes a safe space for contemporary students to explore the implications of these narratives, and this also for themselves.

Wise Guildelüec immediately realizes that this petal would serve her well to create the same miracle with the princess, so upon her order, the servant strikes the first animal that had recovered and secures the petal. With its help, Guildelüec then wakes up the princess from her coma, and both engage in a profound conversation. Whereas the latter bitterly complains about men's unreliability and treachery, the wife comforts her and assures her that Eliduc has been completely loyal to the princess but believes that she is virtually dead. The wife then announces that she will take the veil to free her husband from the marital bond with her so that he can live in marriage with the princess. As she confirms: "Mut ai pur li mun quot dolent" (1094; my heart is very sorrowful for him), so she has no trouble removing herself from the marriage with Eliduc. She admires the princess's almost divine beauty and fully understands why her husband has fallen in love with her. In fact, she was filled with pity for the two lovers at that point when she still had assumed that the princess was dead: "For pity on the one hand, for love on the other, I will never be happy again" (1027–28).

Indeed, Guildelüec establishes a monastery for herself and rules it as the abbess until her old age, while Eliduc and the princess marry and lead a happy life. At the end, however, the second wife, Guilliadun, also joins the same monastery, whereas Eliduc retires into his own monastic community. The three exchange messages among each other and communicate well in their service to God, which provides a happy end to this rather sophisticated and challenging *lai*. Interpreters have had a difficult time coming to terms with this outcome and mostly content themselves with describing the individual moves by the three figures, crossing time and space; for an influential but rather speculative discussion, see Bloch^[19], pp. 83–89.

As difficult as it might be to develop a good interpretation of “Eliduc,” it provides considerable opportunities for an open-ended discussion in class, which entitles students to engage with various positions that might or might not contradict each other. There is no doubt as to Eliduc’s superior skills as a knight, military leader, and also as a captain steering his ship through the storm to the safe harbor—certainly a strongly metaphorical expression. Whenever there is a physical challenge, he knows exceedingly well how to handle it, so he regularly comes to a ruler’s rescue. However, when he falls in love with the English princess, he suddenly proves to be completely helpless and subject to his emotions and her erotic strategies. By contrast, his wife, once she has realized the young woman’s absolute beauty and hence her husband’s true and new love, resolutely makes a decision which at least superficially favors Eliduc’s desires over her own. Guildelüec knows that he is completely in love with the young woman and that she has no right on insisting that they stay married. It remains uncertain whether there is marital love between Guildelüec and Eliduc, but they are certainly strong partners or friends, which is also indicated by the parallel suffixes of their names. But there are no children, a topic which does not seem to have interested Marie de France at all.

There is nothing easy about Marie’s “Eliduc,” which hence proves to be an ideal case for a flipped classroom, inviting numerous different comments, analyses, or interpretations once the critical issues have been clearly marked. The political and military dimension proves to be highly problematic, the marriage between Eliduc and Guildelüec seems to work well, but she does not seem to have any hard time to withdraw and enter a monastery. The young princess, Guilladun, seems to be a victim in the entire affair, but she had initiated the wooing herself and had insisted on him taking her back to his country: “‘Od vus,’ fet ele, ‘me amenez,/Puis que remaneir ne volez!’” (vv. 679–80; “Take me with you,” she says, “since you do not wish to stay!”). Eliduc knows only too well that he would act against the Christian teachings taking her as a second wife (v. 603), but his love for the princess drives him, robbing him of his personal freedom. The only person who knows how to act by her own rational decision proves to be his wife, and she is the one who leaves her husband to take the veil, which thus frees the two lovers to live out their passion for each other.

There are many perspectives involved in this verse narrative, and it would be impossible simply to condemn any one of the three figures. Marie invites complex conversations about this triangular relationship without criticizing anyone. The wife demonstrates a deep understanding of her husband’s love for the princess, whom she actually admires as a most impressive, almost angelic beauty. Moreover, she has strong feelings for Eliduc, whom she only wants to see happy. Hence, her decision to free him from their marital bonds could be regarded as an expression of great respect and also of her inner strength, independence, and desire to dedicate her life to God. Other approaches might entail the very opposite, viewing her as a weak individual who can be easily manipulated and is depicted as a typically submissive wife with no free will. Arguments in her favor might entail that she knows exactly what she is doing and then carries out her plan without delay, being most effective in that. Moreover, one could argue that she has a deep understanding of love, knowing that one can never force another person to love you. To counter that, Guildelüec could be regarded as a slavish personality who does not know how to fight for her marriage, her own happiness, and who easily gives up her agency.

Eliduc equally proves to be a complex personality whom we are asked to admire while he operates most skillfully as a military leader and defender of his king. But as soon as love enters his heart—has he never loved his wife? After all, the narrator emphasizes the very opposite: “they loved one another loyally” (v. 12), but since she also adds the adverb “léaument” (loyally) we might wonder what kind of love this might be—Eliduc is no longer master of his own destiny and must do everything to be together with his mistress.

Finally, Guilladun cannot be really blamed for her strong feelings for Eliduc, but she could have first inquired about his marital status before she began to woo him for his love. Does she not overwhelm him with the gifts, symbols of love, and her tenderness toward him? However, as Guildelüec admits herself, the princess represents the highest ideal of female beauty and appears like an angel or a saint. Yet, to turn the argument around again, did she not seduce Eliduc, and was she not rather naive in urging him to elope with her? To figure out what perspective might be the most convincing, we really have to return to the original and exam-

ine the text as carefully as possible, considering every word used to characterize all the three figures, their words, and their actions (as to the value of source studies to establish a sound foundation for all studies, see now Classen^[20]). True knowledge emerges only if we engage with the original, authentic text, object, or material, and the proper examination of the knowledge-based facts can then lead to wisdom.

The realization that the entire debate about the morality and ethics of the three characters depends heavily on the careful analysis of every word in the text can thus also serve exceedingly well to explain the great need for linguistic studies. Even though Claire M. Waters offered an excellent and trustworthy English translation of Marie's *lais*, this does not free us from examining critically how she formulated her thoughts and what she has the three persons say in their conversations. Every word in the original counts because the poet addresses highly sensitive issues of great implications for everyone involved. If "Eliduc" truly motivates our students to study the issues raised here more thoroughly, then there is only a small step forward to promote the study of the original language. In the Humanities, we know about that necessity extremely well, especially because we teach foreign languages. But it is a very different challenge to convince our students about this logic and the value of knowing Anglo-Norman well, for instance. At least a good command of modern French can serve this purpose, so we can only hope that the in-depth analysis of this famous *lai* will lay the foundation for open-ended discussion and hence a thorough analysis of the textual evidence also in the origin. Anyone involved in international trade and hence trade contracts, or political and hence political treatises is fully aware of the intricacies and pitfalls of working with partners using a different language. When every word counts, when people's lives depend on a solid understanding of the foreign text, the study of other languages suddenly becomes a crucial epistemological tool *sine qua non*, whether in literary or in legal terms.

Most importantly, however, Marie de France's "Eliduc" invites heated discussions; it forces readers to take sides, to argue about their positions, and to validate those by way of a close reading of this famous text. Apparently, research on this intriguing *lai* has so far not resulted in any consensus as to the proper interpretation of its meaning. This actually serves as a great advantage for our teaching situation because students are hence strongly encouraged to explore

the text on their own in a flipped classroom, to formulate their opinions, to listen to their classmates, and thus to learn about the nature of a critical debate. There is, we might say regarding "Eliduc," no right or wrong answer, whether we apply religious or erotic categories.

We cannot simply claim that Gueldelüec is like a forerunner of the famous Griselda in Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* (Day X, Story X; McWilliam (trans.)^[21]) who quietly submits under every order issued by her husband, although he is 'only' testing her absolute loyalty. Instead, she is a resolute, proactive wife who understands clearly when a stage in her life has come to a closure and a new one, dedicated to God, is beckoning to her. She agrees that the princess is divine beauty itself and that this sufficiently explains her husband's change of heart. It remains a matter of debate whether we could or should defend and support her decision to separate from Eliduc and to join monastic life. But we must keep in mind that many years later, Eliduc and his second wife Guilliadun take the same step, that the old abbess welcomes the younger woman as her spiritual sister, that Eliduc becomes a monk as well, and that he and the two women entertain regular contacts via messengers and letters.

We are left with the ultimate and unanswerable question of what love in its erotic dimension truly represents and what its meaning might be for the individual when it collides with social and moral constraints. But we know for sure that Gueldelüec wants her husband to be happy and to enjoy the new love with Guilliadun, and this is out of respect and love for both. We might even wonder, certainly a significant challenge for students and scholars alike, what she really loses when she frees Eliduc from his marital bonds. She continues to enjoy the same aristocratic lifestyle, even in her monastery, and she can translate her secular life into a spiritual existence. By removing herself from the marriage with Eliduc, she preserves her friendship with him. Thereby, she preserves both of their individual happiness; she can now freely pursue a religious path toward her future salvation, and she rescues in that process the innocent and almost divine English princess from a horrible destiny.

Of course, this curious development in his life does not make it necessarily right, does not justify his transgression, but Gueldelüec understands only too well that fighting against the new constellation would not achieve anything, whereas her voluntary action helps her to gain much, or rather

to preserve mostly what she had enjoyed before, at any rate. Some students obviously might feel uncomfortable with the outcome of this verse narrative, and who would not, either in the Middle Ages or today, because Eliduc had broken his oath of marital fidelity. Nevertheless, we could concomitantly agree that Guildelüec emerges as the true heroine in this story, as a strong, wise, determined, and intelligent woman who knows exceedingly well how to cope successfully within her feudal framework and to handle a sudden paradigm shift in her own existence. Whether we today, either in the West or the East, would tolerate such a development and would agree with Guildelüec's decision, remains a matter of great debate^[22]. We are profoundly challenged in our concepts of individuality, gender orientation, ethics, morality, love, and marriage. Students can thus realize through a critical reading of this verse narrative the extent to which even fundamental concepts have always been the result of human constructions and are hence not written in stone.

2.2. Dietrich von der Gletze/Glezze: A Middle High German Example for the Flipped Classroom

Let us also consider a slightly later, equally masterfully developed verse narrative, Dietrich von der Gletze's *Der borte* (for an intro. and trans., see Classen (trans.)^[23], no. 3; cf. also Ridder and Ziegeler (eds.)^[24], vol. 1/2, , no. 43, with some introductory but definitely insufficient comments by Anne und Matthias Kirchhoff; English trans. by Coxon, vol. 5). The text was composed sometime in the late thirteenth century, but we do not know much at all about the author who does not seem to have composed any other text. His epithet indicates that he lived in northern Bohemia, but the language indicates that he originated from Swabia in Southwestern Germany. The central motif of this story does not find any significant parallels in any other medieval text, although the issue at stake, conflicts in marriage, is a very common theme in late medieval *fabliaux* and *mæren*.

We are presented here with a young aristocratic couple. Their marriage pleases both, and they appear to collaborate closely, enjoying complete agreement with each other. However, the young man, Conrad, is discontent with his lack of honor as a knight, so he travels to a tournament to gain more accolades. During his absence, a mysterious knight appears who is immediately smitten by love for the young lady, and

he offers her all his magical animals that would guarantee the owner certain victory in all hunting competitions. She adamantly refuses, however, because she does not want to prostitute herself. But then he takes the final step and even offers her his belt, which would grant the person wearing it absolutely certain honor. Knowing too well that her husband is lacking in just that, she finally agrees and gains all animals and the belt in return for the sexual affair, as painful as this forced transgression of her marital vows proves to be. In fact, she is virtually forced into this 'soft' prostitution, certainly a highly problematic issue, which troubles our modern readers just as much as it did the late medieval audiences.

Nature surrounding them responds enthusiastically to their lovemaking, but tragedy awaits her soon. A servant has observed them and reveals the transgression to her husband. The young man is so distraught about this that he immediately leaves the tournament and travels to the distant court of Brabant without returning home. He never questions his wife, does not investigate the circumstances, and so simply runs away from his personal conflict.

His wife patiently waits for him for two years, during which she manages their estate effectively, demonstrating her organizational and administrative skills all by herself. Eventually, however, she wants to get her husband back, so she cross-dresses and appears as Knight Heinrich at the Brabant court. There, she immediately wins all the hunting competitions because she owns those magical animals. And she defeats a mighty British knight who had beaten her husband just before that, which underscores once again Conrad's physical weakness and lack of knightly skills.

Soon after, the two foreign 'knights' are stationed together on a guard post, where Conrad begs his new friend to share at least one of his animals, which would then help him to strengthen his public standing. Heinrich at first refuses, but finally sets a condition for granting the gift, that is, 'he' wants to have sex with him since he enjoys only the love of men. Conrad finds it regretful to learn that the other man is homosexual, but he quickly agrees and lies down to receive the other one^[25]. At that moment, Heinrich reveals 'his' true identity and severely lambasts her husband: "What a loser you are! Are you willing to turn into a heretic in exchange for the dogs and my goshawk? You are a man without virtues! I am your wife in marriage" (p. 27). She explains finally that she had committed adultery in order to help him, but not out

of any sexual interests, whereas Conrad was so greedy for one of the magical animals that he was willing to sacrifice his morality and to commit a moral sin, at least in the minds of Christians: “it was a crime against Christianity what you would have done voluntarily. You are a corruptible man considering that you would have abandoned, just for two minuscule gifts, your honor. I tell you, I am furious about that” (p. 28; cf. Ribaj^[26]).

Subsequently, however, she forgives him for his major fault, hands over all the animals and also the belt, and both then return home, which concludes the story and resolves the marital conflict. As complex as the narrative plot proves to be, the outcome clarifies all and invites us to discuss the situation at length and in depth. There are many questions we could raise without easily finding a good answer. For instance, was she justified in ‘selling’ her body to the foreign knight in order to help her husband gain honor? Did she sleep with the knight really only because she was selfless and wanted to support Conrad? All of nature responds to that lovemaking with great happiness as if approving that extramarital affair. She scoffs at him and ridicules him for his poor trade, leaving him with none of his critically important knightly attributes. But he contradicts her, emphasizes that he had experienced the highest degree of happiness with her, and begs finally for a kiss from her, which she actually grants him. The text specifically states: “The lady kissed him lovingly” (p. 23, “minnenclich,” v. 377), as if she had enjoyed their affair as well. Subsequently, the knight leaves, never to be seen again, as if he had been nothing but an allegorical figure who serves to challenge the couple. We never learn of his true identity and might wonder about his symbolic function.

Both certainly fail to uphold their marital vows, but in her mind, she committed only a minor infraction on his behalf, sacrificing herself for his happiness, whereas he was guilty of a most serious sin, having been willing to lend his body for an act of homosexual activity in order to acquire an illusionary sense of masculinity, hence identity. Conrad never disputes this, but he begs his wife for forgiveness, especially because he had not demonstrated any real interest in this deviant form of sexual preference. In fact, she quickly gives in, does not harbor bad feelings about him, and both then enjoy a happy marriage for the rest of their lives. Nevertheless, the issue of troubled masculinity remains at stake,

and she could also be charged for her dubious willingness to purchase those miraculous animals and the belt by selling her body to the foreign knight. She cross-dresses, but only as a mask to hide her true gender identity.

As far as we can tell, this woman has no interest in transforming fully into a man and later happily abandons her playful role to cede it to her husband. In the flipped classroom, hence, all students are strongly encouraged to take sides, to reflect on various approaches, to comment on the wife’s various actions, on the young husband’s obvious weaknesses and failures, and then, ultimately, on the mysterious knight who offers all those magical animals and the centrally important belt. He disappears, to be sure, completely without any of his usual knightly trappings, and might be a divine or spiritual figure who appears only in passing to inject himself into this actually rather fragile marriage and to help the couple to work on their relationship.

To evaluate both characters more carefully, we really would need to examine the original text in Middle High German, although for teaching purposes, the provocative nature of this verse narrative proves already to be highly productive. Discussing this text in conjunction with contemporary poems, such as Old French *fabliaux*, students encounter a most intriguing literary framework for many different perspectives. There is, once again, no absolutely clear outcome with a solid resolution, as Conrad gains his new reputation only by means of those animals and the belt, whereas his wife, former Heinrich, has demonstrated throughout her strength as an individual and her ability to carry out a sophisticated play with her male gender role. But was she really justified and correct in submitting to the foreign knight’s offers? Undoubtedly, she also became a victim of this seduction and bribery, even though she did it on behalf of her husband, and not for herself to gain any profit^[27]. Undoubtedly, and this was the purpose with the extensive discussion of this late medieval verse narrative, as mysterious and puzzling many elements in it prove to be, students regularly find themselves deeply provoked, intrigued, challenged, and hence motivated to engage with it.

3. Conclusions

As we have seen through a close examination of these two high and late medieval narratives, we can achieve ex-

traordinary success in teaching within a flipped classroom if the materials to be discussed are open-ended, inviting various approaches in the interpretation, thus allowing students to pursue their own perspectives, here strongly determined by the gender issue and adultery. Both Marie de France and Dietrich von der Gletze created unique narratives that were not based on older sources and that did not experience any significant reception process. This means for us that those stories represent ideal teaching material because they invite many questions and discussions without being fully pre-determined in the way how we are supposed to read them. Consequently, students are invited to analyze them according to their own cultural concepts despite their vast distance from the medieval world.

The critical issues are easily recognizable also today, though the poets' positions appear to be quite different from what we might expect today. Thus, these open-ended narratives prove to be highly provocative, stimulating, and thus very rewarding for students who do not have to rely on a larger body of scholarship, which simply does not exist in these cases.

Altogether, that means, there remains considerable freedom to engage with these two texts quite freely and yet also through a close reading of the original, if possible, or at least of the English translations. There are many other examples in medieval literature that would allow the transformation of a traditional classroom into a location for an open flow of ideas, perspectives, and interpretations, all of which promises to provide our students with a strong sense of empowerment, and this also when they explore the Middle Ages and need to overcome various historical hurdles (history, language, culture, religion). This is a particularly intriguing realization because it underscores the timeless value of medieval literature, if we wisely select specific texts of unique value for our contemporary discussions and create in that process the desired flipped classroom. The issues raised both by Marie de France and Dietrich von der Gletze are somewhat extreme—gender trouble, masculinity, honor, love and friendship in marriage—but with the help of only a slight 'translation' into our own world, we face here fantastic opportunities to explore fundamental problems and conflicts in marital life and with regards identity issues and social status. There is nothing really easy in the lives of these protagonists, and discussing their (wrong?) decisions, students become empowered to

think about their own morality, ethics, and values vis-à-vis their personal relationships now and in the future.

What does this hence entail regarding the flipped or open-ended classroom? As all good educators know only too well, critical engagement with the material studies proves to be the essential teaching tool. In traditional classrooms, teachers can ask students to form groups and formulate theses as to the evaluation of individual stories, motifs, characters, or themes. One can also divide the class into groups debating each other. Writing exercises following those exchanges, either in groups or individually, translate the oral efforts into more solid intellectual reflections.

In more modern classrooms, one can use any of the currently available learning management systems (LMS), such as Top Hat. The same discussions or debates will take place, but the LMS makes it more interactive, with everyone observing what the class peers have written. This can then lead to further arguments and deeper analysis of the texts investigated. Many scholars have already investigated the methodologies, practicalities, methods, and feasibilities of the flipped classroom, and this even in teaching situations addressing writing, literature at large, and language studies^[28]. Intriguingly, the study of medieval literature also lends itself extremely well to pursue investigations of open-ended questions, which hence empowers students. Even though knowledge of the cultural background of the Middle Ages is often lacking, these two examples presented above demonstrate convincingly their potentiality for student-centered learning. The results that I could observe in many different class settings have consistently been that students felt encouraged to explore ethical, moral, political, and philosophical issues that ultimately also pertain to themselves, since these medieval tales highlight universal concerns with friendship, love, marriage, sexuality, identity, honor, morality, and ethics.

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